



# KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## NEWS RELEASE

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**MEDIA CONTACT:** Lisa Y. Gross

**Office:** (502) 564-2015 **Cellular:** (502) 330-5063 **E-mail:** [lisa.gross@education.ky.gov](mailto:lisa.gross@education.ky.gov)

### **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MOVING FORWARD IN JEFFERSON COUNTY**

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) – Kentucky’s largest school district and the state Department of Education are working collaboratively to improve schools designated “persistently low-achieving” (PLA).

A second round of federal School Improvement Grant ([SIG](#)) funding totaling more than \$4.7 will further the partnership’s efforts to implement reform initiatives and improve student proficiency at seven Jefferson County public schools. As part of the grant, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) will provide Education Recovery Specialists to work with the district’s staff in reading and math.

“School improvement is a collaborative process, and the Jefferson County school district, the Jefferson County Teachers Association ([JCTA](#)) and KDE are partners in this effort,” said Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday. “The payoff for this work will be improved student learning outcomes in persistently low-achieving schools.”

“We value the technical assistance and guidance that KDE has provided our district as we partner to help support our schools and students,” said Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) Superintendent Donna Hargens. “We recognize that these grants afford us the opportunity to set a statewide example of successful school turnaround.”

Since 2010, 22 schools statewide have been identified as PLA. All were eligible for SIG funding. They outlined their plans for improvement, selected intervention options and developed budgets. PLA schools must implement one of four intervention options that are designed to lead to academic improvement: external management; turnaround/restaffing; school closure; or transformation.

Both cohorts of JCPS schools identified as PLA — six schools identified in the spring of 2010 and seven identified in November 2010 – have implemented the turnaround/restaffing option.

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**JEFFERSON COUNTY SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED AS PERSISTENTLY LOW-ACHIEVING**

<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b>SIG FUNDING AMOUNT</b>	<b>GRANT PERIOD</b>	<b>COHORT</b>
The Academy @ Shawnee	\$1.5 million	3 years	1
Western Middle	\$1.5 million	3 years	1
Frost Middle	\$1.5 million	3 years	1
Western High School	\$1.5 million	3 years	1
Valley Traditional High	\$1.5 million	3 years	1
Fern Creek Traditional High	\$1.5 million	3 years	1
Doss High	\$515,583	1 year	2
Fairdale High	\$835,035	1 year	2
Iroquois High	\$628,404	1 year	2
Knight Middle	\$621,627	1 year	2
Seneca High	\$664,706	1 year	2
Southern High	\$611,559	1 year	2
Waggener High	\$841,336	1 year	2

“After a somewhat rocky start, the improvement process in the JCPS system is now being implemented smoothly,” said Dewey Hensley, associate commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education’s Office of District 180. “All of the PLA schools in JCPS have strong plans for improvement, and the SIG funding will provide the necessary monetary resources to help those schools improve and make adequate yearly progress.

“KDE and JCPS officials worked together to improve the district’s compliance with federal and state mandates,” Hensley added. “The district reviewed its restaffing actions in the first group of PLA schools and made changes in its process. Plus, JCPS and JCTA entered into a new MOA in June 2011 that improved the district’s ability to place qualified, experienced staff in the PLA schools.

“We believe that the district’s actions, coupled with the commitment of Superintendent Donna Hargens, will enable JCPS to move forward and improve the PLA schools.”

JCPS took the following actions to improve its compliance with SIG mandates:

- reviewed teacher competency criteria used for restaffing PLA schools
- added best-practice items to the list of competencies and focused on research-based teacher abilities
- revamped strategies to place teachers who are experienced in school improvement activities into PLA schools
- reviewed recruiting efforts and ensured that mentoring programs for new teachers in PLA schools are successful
- restructured interview teams at PLA schools to strengthen the selection of teachers

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As mandated by state and federal statute and regulation, KDE must annually identify PLAs that are eligible for SIG funding. Kentucky's definitions, processes and options for improvement are based on the language contained in [House Bill 176](#) (codified as KRS 160.346), legislation related to persistently low-performing schools that was passed by the 2010 General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Steve Beshear in January 2010. Implementation details for HB 176 are clarified by state regulation [703 KAR 5:130](#), which was approved by the Kentucky Board of Education, also in January 2010.

Schools may be identified in one of three tiers:

**Federal Tier I**

- 1) A Title I school that is in the lowest five percent or lowest five scoring schools, whichever is greater, of all Title I schools that are identified in any one of the school improvement categories under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and that failed to make AYP for three consecutive years.

**Or**

- 2) A Title I high school whose graduation rate, based on the state's approved graduation rate calculation, has been 60 percent or less for three consecutive years.

**Federal Tier II**

- 1) A non-Title I school that contains grades 7-12, or any combination thereof, that is in the lowest five percent or lowest five scoring schools, whichever is greater, of all non-Title I schools that contain grades 7-12 or any combination thereof, that also has at least 35 percent or greater poverty as defined in NCLB and has failed to make AYP for three consecutive years.

**Or**

- 2) A non-Title I high school whose graduation rate, based on the state's approved graduation rate calculation, has been 60 percent or less for three consecutive years.

**Federal Tier III**

All Title I schools that are identified in any school improvement category under NCLB and are not included in the definitions of Federal Tier I.

Schools identified as Tier I PLAs participate in leadership assessment activities. These leadership assessments are administered by teams of current and former educators, parents and others trained in the process. The assessments rely heavily on specific indicators found in the *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* to determine the capacity of the school's principal, school council and district leadership.

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In addition, a Working Conditions Survey provided information about conditions within the school that support student achievement. Reports for each leadership assessment provided relevant facts and recommendations for next steps to help the identified schools and their districts make improvements.

PLA schools and their districts also must select one of four intervention options that are designed to lead to academic improvement:

- External Management Option -- requires that the day-to-day management of the school be transferred to an education management organization.
- Turnaround/Restaffing Option -- requires the replacement of the principal and the existing school-based decision making council unless the leadership assessment report recommends otherwise; retaining no more than 50 percent of the faculty and staff at the school; and developing and implementing a plan of action designed to turn around student performance.
- School Closure Option -- requires the closure of an existing school and the transfer of its students to other schools within the district that are meeting their accountability measures; and reassignment of the school's faculty and staff to available positions within the district.
- Transformation Option -- requires replacing the school principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation option and replacing the school council members unless the leadership assessment reports recommend otherwise; and instituting an extensive set of specified strategies designed to turn around the school.

Financial assistance for PLAs comes from federal SIG 1003g funds. Under Section 1003(g) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), SIGs are designed to improve student achievement in Title I schools identified for improvement, corrective action or restructuring, as well as schools that are eligible for, but don't receive, Title I funding and who have been identified as persistently low-achieving. The goal of the program is to enable those schools to make AYP and exit improvement status.

Each year, KDE must determine if the schools have met their goals and are making progress toward improvement to continue funding for each year of the three years in the grant period. In addition, each PLA school has three Educational Recovery (ER) staff -- an Educational Recovery Leader to mentor the principal and Educational Recovery Specialists for English/language arts and mathematics to work with teachers as they improve instruction and teaching strategies in these two critical areas.

Quarterly reporting to KDE, in addition to feedback from the ER staff, will determine if schools are progressing and districts are supporting their efforts.

Title I schools that make AYP for two consecutive years will no longer be subject to consequences under NCLB and therefore will no longer be considered PLAs. Schools will continue to receive SIG funding for the period defined, even if they are no longer identified as PLAs.

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